Pelicans Thrive Near New Orleans

PELICANS nesting. Pelicans flying. Pelicans swimming. Pelicans by the thousands. It's hard to believe that these teeming birds are considered an endangered species.

The scene is the Baptiste Collette Bird Islands, landforms created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers near the mouth of the Mississippi River. On one 24-acre island, *Pelecanus occidentalis,* the brown pelican, has chosen to stage a comeback this year, after suffering the ravages of Hurricane Georges in 1998.

The six Bird Islands exist thanks to a Corps of Engineers program known as "beneficial use of dredged material," which helps the environment by creating wetlands or wildlife habitat as a byproduct of clearing navigation channels.

The dredged material that built the six Bird Islands came from Baptiste Collette Bayou, a 10-mile channel below New Orleans, La. The waterway connects the Mississippi River eastward with Breton Sound and the Gulf of Mexico. The Bird Islands form a chain about 2.5 miles long that parallels the seaward end of the channel.

"Although brown pelicans routinely use the Bird Islands for resting habitat, prior to this year they were not known to nest on the islands," said Edward Creef, a Corps biologist in the New Orleans District.

In September 1998 Hurricane Georges virtually obliterated the pelicans' nearby home, Grand Gosier Island, in the Chandeleur Islands. The Corps of Engineers is planning to restore Grand Gosier under the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act, using material from a navigation channel.

Brown pelicans died out in coastal Louisiana during the 1960s, when chemicals in a class known as chlorinated hydrocarbons, such as DDT, took their toll.

So how can brown pelicans be thriving and remain endangered? Well, the word is that their recovery is so complete that they may soon be removed from the endangered species

The 21st-Century Truck Initiative is aimed at improving fuel efficiency, boosting safety, slashing costs and cutting emissions.

Doug Spinks

Brown pelicans and laughing gulls fly over Plover Island, at the edge of the Gulf of Mexico near the mouth of the Mississippi River. The 24-acre island is one of six built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

list, a Washington spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said. — *John Hall, USACE New Orleans District Public Affairs Office*

TAACOM Leads Vehicle-Improvement Effort

THE Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command's National Automotive Center will be the Department of Defense and Army lead for a new transportation effort aimed at improving truck fuel efficiency, boosting safety, slashing costs and cutting emissions.

The 21st-Century Truck Initiative, introduced by Vice President Al Gore in April, will develop and demonstrate commercially viable truck and propulsion systems technology. The program is a follow-on effort to the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles, which was formed at the beginning of the Clinton-Gore administration. PNGV sought to increase automobile efficiency threefold without sacrificing safety or cost.

"The Army has a great stake in this initiative because of the size of our fleet. This initiative folds into the Army Vision for Transformation because it will help make us a lighter, more mobile, more fuel-efficient fleet," said Paul Skalny, NAC's associate director.

The initiative also includes the U.S. departments of Energy and Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. trucking industry.

Gore said the Army is an important player because it owns 250,000 trucks and buys trucks for all the armed forces and, because of its research initiatives, will play a critical part in developing the new technologies — buying them and putting them on the road.

"Trucks are vital to the Army — they are the service's workhorses, the logistical backbone," said GEN John G. Coburn, commanding general of the U.S. Army Materiel Command.

Similarly, trucks are imperative to the nation, accounting for more than 81 percent of America's freight business.

Coburn said military trucks cost about $2 billion a year to operate. Roughly 65 percent of Army trucks' life-cycle costs are directly related to how much it costs to operate and maintain them.

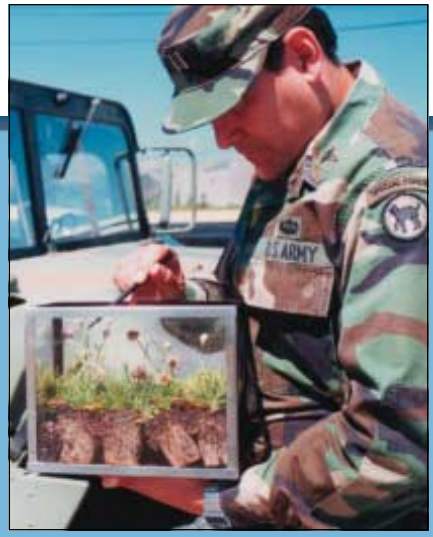
"If we can get more fuel efficiency — if we can get lower costs associated with operating and maintaining those trucks, then we can divert those scarce dollars to other programs, such as training," Coburn pointed out.

According to a statement from the Fuel Efficient Army After Next Task Force, fuel constitutes 70 percent of the bulk tonnage — about 600,000 gallons per day — needed to sustain a military force on the battlefield. The Army After 2010 goal is to reduce deployed force fuel requirements by 75 percent. — *Rae Higgins, TAACOM PAO*

Reservist Counters Vector-borne Diseases

CPT Lorenzo Rivera, an Army Reservist from the 452nd Medical Detachment's Preventive Medicine Unit in Florida, performs entomological surveys on vector-borne diseases. One of his recent assignments was to collect ticks at Parks Reserve Forces Training Area near Dublin, Calif., and send his findings to the Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine at Fort Lewis, Wash.

Vector-borne diseases are spread by organisms that carry pathogens from one host to another. Mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, spiders and rodents are some of the more common hosts likely to come in contact with humans.



Lynne Schaack

CPT Lorenzo Rivera looks at a terrarium of ticks he collected in the bivouac area at Parks Reserve Forces Training Area, Calif.

In the Dublin area, ticks are likely to carry Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. In other areas they often spread Lyme disease. By producing and disseminating brochures with photos, Rivera educates soldiers about ticks, diseases they carry and the symptoms to watch for.

Last year, Rivera's unit deployed to El Salvador and surveyed areas known to present health problems for soldiers and civilians. Sent ahead of the troops, Rivera's team identified the local "enemy" as skunks and mosquitoes. This made it possible to establish a successful defense.

"Water can be a major source of disease," said Rivera. "We suggested that people clean out garbage dumps, protect their drinking-water sources and dry up water sources where mosquitoes might lay their eggs."

Rivera, an operating room nurse in civilian life, often repeats his unit's motto: We defend the public against all enemies foreign, domestic, small and microscopic.

"That's our job," he said with a grin. — *Lynne Schaak, Parks Reserve Forces Training Area PAO*

Please send your contributions or questions to Cynthia Houston, National Outreach Team Leader, U.S. Army Environmental Center, 5179 Hoadley Road, Attn.: SFIM-AEC-PA. Bldg. 4415, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5401, or e-mail ***Environmental.Front@aec.apgea.army.mil****. Houston may be reached by phone at (410) 436-1270 or (DSN) 584-1270.*